

Suffering What They Must: The Shifting Alliances of Romania and Finland in World War II

A Monograph

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Abstract

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Operational level planners of major powers consider small nation political developments in devising operational approaches and detailed plans, taking into account differences in national objectives and the potential for a small nation to switch sides during a conflict. Romania and Finland in World War II provide examples of small nations caught in conflict between major powers, driving alliances and actions to survive. International relations theories forwarded by Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Walt, describing calculations of balance of power and a resulting tendency to balance against or bandwagon with a threat, help explain small nation behavior. Understanding the agent-structure dynamic within governments is essential for understanding how small nations make such decisions.

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Introduction

In the cases of Romania and Finland and their alliances in World War II, the overarching theme is that small nations caught between major powers do what they must to survive despite their preferences. Furthermore, changing circumstances largely out of the control of small nations can compel those states to change sides during a war, posing a challenge to military planners. International relations theories assist in explaining why nations choose alliances and the operational artist considers these theories in understanding an environment. However, the military planner then must apply that knowledge to understanding a specific strategic environment, and then translate that knowledge into conceptual and detailed plans for military operations. The stories of Romania and Finland in World War II provide historical examples to understand small state political behavior in alliances and the operational implications for military planners.

Small states caught in the midst of a major power¹ war appear as early as the fifth century BC. Thucydides described an encounter during the Peloponnesian War between representatives of the great empire of Athens and the minor colony of Melos. The Athenian message presaged that of Josef Stalin to Finnish diplomats in October 1939 and Joachim von Ribbentrop to the Romanian prime minister in November 1940. Though separated by over two millennia, it seems the circumstances provide for a common understanding of large and small nation relations, with less emphasis on morality and more on power. Right is “only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”²

¹ The Correlates of War, a project to collect and use quantitative data about nations, lists those states considered major powers. For most of the period from the early 20th century up to World War II and beyond, the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Russia and the Soviet Union are major powers. By this standard, Romania and Finland are therefore small nations or minor powers.

² Thucydides, Robert B. Strassler, and Richard Crawley, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 352.

Alliances are “formal associations of states bound by the mutual commitment to use military force against non-member states to defend member states’ integrity.”³ Kenneth Waltz proposes a basic theory that encompasses alliances, expressed as a balance of power. At its heart, Waltz’s theory assumes an anarchic system of nations with no higher, governing authority. This lack of authority compels nations to be ready for inevitable violence. He describes a self-help system where a state seeks to guarantee its own security, but with the possibility of cooperation. Waltz puts a very fine point on the nature of this cooperation. When a nation considers joining an alliance, it calculates more than just a potential gain in relation to a threat. Ultimately, even a member of an alliance may turn out to be a future threat. Therefore, the calculation of the total effect on a state’s security is the more relevant framework.⁴ This calculation thereby provides a mechanism for considering the phenomenon of how a state chooses an alliance, and how it may choose to remain unallied. It also provides a logic for how a state switches sides, turning its guns against a former ally in coordination with a former enemy, as Romania did in 1944, or striking a separate peace, as Finland did in the same year.

It is important to note that Waltz does not propose that a state necessarily aims for a balance of power, but rather that states are in a competitive system that compels behavior that tends towards a balance. Waltz establishes this system as one in which states are unitary actors that seek power and preservation and use whatever means are available to that end. States may use external methods to strengthen their position in regards to another state or internal methods such as increasing production of or better managing resources. The interactions of the states in this system produce an outcome, a balance of power.⁵

³ Heinz Gärtner, *Small States and Alliances* (Vienna: Österreichisches Institut für Internationale Politik, 2000), 2.

⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 102-105.

⁵ Ibid., 118.

Stephen Walt went further than Waltz in describing alliances, and proposed some hypotheses for the formation of alliances and the resulting significance for policy formation. Walt described the dynamic of what he called balancing versus bandwagoning. A state may choose to balance, or ally together with another state against a mutual threat. Alternatively, a state may choose to bandwagon, or ally together with a threatening state in order to suffer less.

Balancing together with another state carries its own risks and considerations. Allying with another state places the weaker nation in a potentially precarious position. The weaker state can be at risk of domination from its new partner. The opportunity for the weaker state is that entering an alliance may increase its prestige and enhance its position with its new partners, who appreciate the power it contributes to the alliance. In contrast, bandwagoning could diminish the weaker state's prestige since the stronger power has less need for an ally.⁶

According to Walt, a small state bandwagons when it allies with a country that is its most significant threat. Sometimes strength attracts states. It may do so from a motive of appeasement, such that the more dominant state may spare the weaker as it seeks greater domination. It also may do so in order to gain from military victories. The important distinction is that the appeasement motive is defensive, in that the state seeks simply to protect itself from harm, while the other motive is offensive, in that the state will use military force for some gain.⁷ The offensive dynamic is of particular importance when examining Romania's alliances in World War II, especially when considering its hopes to achieve territorial gains.

Walt added the element of perceived threat to the calculation. He suggested that states might balance not against a more powerful country, but against the more dangerous threat regardless of absolute power. In the process of calculating the threat, states do consider the total power of a nation, including military and industrial resources. However, this aspect alone is not

⁶ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* Vol 9, no. 4 (1985): 4-6.

⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

enough to determine a threat. States also consider several other factors, like perceptions of offensive intention. If a state lacks a clear military superiority, but displays significant offensive intention, a weaker state will likely choose to balance against it. In addition, a state's offensive power may cause a weaker state to balance against it. However, if the minor power faces a state with overwhelming ability and has little chance of success, the small state may bandwagon together with the threat. Lastly, the ability to project power, in Walt's assessment, is a function of proximity and declines as proximity increases.

Altogether, Walt's contribution is a further refinement of "balance of power" to "balance of threat." Walt includes absolute power, offensive intention, offensive power, and proximity as the elements of the threat. Walt also states that balancing is the stronger tendency because it attempts to maintain freedom in the face of subordination.⁸

Understanding a state's tendencies particular to its strategic context is not the only consideration in explaining how small states choose alliances. It is also important to understand how states make decisions internally. Understanding the agent-structure dynamic is a useful analytical tool. In its simplistic form, analyzing events through an agent-structure lens determines if an agent has the freedom to act or if structures such as laws and norms dictate a small state's actions.⁹ Waltz hints at this dynamic by suggesting that states participate in a self-help system because of the anarchic condition. The implications are that if agency is predominant, then the nature and desires of the individuals illuminate how a state chooses alliances. This results in considering an individual as representative of the whole state and the individual's choices that of the state as well. If the structure is predominant, then there is a different sort of interpretation of the state. The role of the individual is less significant and the state itself makes decisions. In the studies here, agent and structure dynamics apply on the level of individual actors as well as states.

⁸ Walt, 9-16.

⁹ Chris Brown and Kirsten Ainley, *Understanding International Relations*, 4th ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 65-66.

The operational planner may use Finland and Romania in World War II as a study to shape ways of thinking about an environment and anticipate how small nation political actions affect military plans. Small nation military planners conduct planning in accordance with their nation's political objectives and constraints. However, the operational level planner for major powers must also account for political considerations such as different objectives and the sudden loss of a former ally during a conflict.

In considering Romania and Finland's alliances in World War II and evaluating how small nations choose alliances, it is important to keep in mind Thucydides' axiom of the strong dominating and the weak suffering what they must. It is also useful to consider the balancing versus bandwagoning dynamic and Walt's criteria for alliance formation. These aspects provide an opportunity to study how operational artists can consider a strategic environment, and, anticipating potential change, arrange their forces and actions on the battlefield.

Romania

Romania shifted alliances during World War II. The country allied first with the Germans against the Soviets and later changed their alliance, joining the Soviets. Romanians themselves see August 23, 1944 as the *Întoarcerea Armelor*, or the return of the guns, celebrating as a national holiday the signing of an armistice with the Allies and declaring war on their former Axis allies. Over the course of the war, two kings and a marshal each determined neutrality or alliance under different circumstances, considering their own desires as well as those of the country. In the end, Romania throughout calculated threat, power, harm, and gain from its own perspective. In this, Romania can be said to have been consistent in its choices and remained on its own side. To illustrate this consistency is an examination of Romania's actions in choosing its alliances in World War II. First Romania wished to remain neutral, then joined the Tripartite Pact, and finally, "returned" its guns by allying with the Soviets against the Germans. These political changes are examples of how structure limits agents and how the operational artist can understand the strategic environment, anticipate change, and act accordingly.

With its experience in World War I, Romania, on the threshold of another grand conflict, had recent and considerable experience in assessing the balance of power and threat. By siding with the Triple Entente, Romania benefited greatly from the peace settlement, expanding its borders beyond historical limits. In addition to the central area of modern Romania, the nation, by treaty, attained control over lands in all cardinal directions. Hungary, Bulgaria, and Russia each had claims on Romanian territory, along with the people of those lands who were of those ethnicities. While these lands had a high proportion of ethnic Romanian peoples and Romania perhaps had some historic justification for the claims, the possession was not absent the harsh feelings of the countries that lost the lands.¹⁰ Nonetheless, Romania in the interbellum period

¹⁰ Mark Axworthy, Cornel I. Scafeș, and Cristian Crăciunoiu, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally: Romanian Armed Forces in the European War, 1941-1945* (New York: Arms and Armour, 1995), 11-12.

achieved its ambition of *România Mare*, or Greater Romania. As much a philosophy as a boundary, Greater Romania represented a wholeness and truth as reflected by border and ethnic unity.¹¹ However, despite recent history and indeed, over a millennia of reckoning danger to its interests and survival, Romania would pay a considerable blood toll in World War II as it weighed the threat and chose its alliances.

A small nation military planner at this time would have to be aware of the complexity of this environment. The problem for Romanian military planners was that surrounding countries of Hungary, Bulgaria, and Russia might initiate conflict in an attempt to take back the contested lands. The distance of potential allies such as Britain and France and the question of if they might intervene was an additional consideration. An operational approach for retaining the lands might be a defensive orientation, which indeed the Romanians adopted, much to their disadvantage when conditions later changed.

Germany's invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1938 triggered a Romanian reassessment of the balance of threat in Europe, but did not compel a change to Romania's official position of neutrality. Despite the position, in March 1939, Romania and Germany signed an economic treaty providing for a number of years of peaceful economic cooperation. In addition to agriculture, industry, and banking cooperation, the treaty established strong links in the oil and petroleum industries as well as provided for the delivery of war materiel to Romania.¹² While the treaty addressed war materiel specifically and established conditions for delivery of Romanian oil to Germany, the treaty itself was not an alliance.

Romania's calculation of the threat in March 1939 centered on its territorial disputes with Hungary. Romania wished to resolve the dispute diplomatically, seeking Germany's assistance in

¹¹ Ilie Ceaușescu, Florin Constantiniu, and Mihail E. Ionescu, *A Turning Point in World War II: 23 August 1944 in Romania* (New York: East European Monographs, 1985), 124-125.

¹² *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, ed. Paul R. Sweet, vol. VI (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949), 92.

resolving the dispute, and even offered a unilateral military de-escalation with Hungary.¹³

However, Germany refused to mediate the dispute, preventing an immediate diplomatic solution and further affecting Romania's calculation of threat and potential consequences.¹⁴



Figure 1. Romania, 1940-1945.

Source: Mark Axworthy, Cornel I. Scafeș, and Cristian Crăciunoiu, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally: Romanian Armed Forces in the European War, 1941-1945* (New York: Arms and Armour, 1995), 12.

¹³ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, 30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

At stake for Romania in the diplomatic and economic discussions was territory, coveted by Hungary, Bulgaria, and Russia, it had gained at the conclusion of World War I. Under King Carol's leadership in 1939, Romania sought a British territorial guarantee despite Britain's desire to avoid further stoking German fears of encirclement by the British or French. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, realizing the strategic importance of Romanian oil to a sustained German war effort, extended a territorial guarantee in April 1939.¹⁵

While receiving the British guarantee, Romania simultaneously sent the message to Germany that such a guarantee did not endanger relations with Germany or further any British attempt to encircle it. On April 19, 1939, Romanian Foreign Minister Grigore Gafencu spoke directly with Adolf Hitler for over an hour to stress that the British guarantee was in relation to Hungary, Bulgaria, and Russia and while Romania could not reject the guarantee, it also did not think Britain could enforce the guarantee in any case. Minister Gafencu assured Hitler that Romania wished to fight for its own independence and that matters of the Great Powers were of no interest to such a small nation. Minister Gafencu and Hitler both agreed that commercial ties between the nations were of great importance and that further mutual trade interests would result in positive relations.¹⁶ The nature of this discussion with Hitler, together with the British territorial guarantees, displays Romania's efforts at remaining neutral as the balance of power and threat were shifting.

A discussion in May 1939 between Minister Gafencu and Vladimir Potemkin, the Soviet Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, illustrates Romania's position on alliances with Russia or Germany. Gafencu expressed Romania's wish to avoid becoming a battleground

¹⁵ Paul N. Hehn, *A Low Dishonest Decade: The Great Powers, Eastern Europe, and the Economic Origins of World War II, 1930-1941* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 312.

¹⁶ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, 291-292.

between two warring powers.¹⁷ This rather frank discussion between two ministers demonstrates that Romania had not yet determined with any certainty its most significant threat.

Romania's desires to remain neutral persisted even after the German and Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939. Despite a military alliance between Romania and Poland, the two countries agreed shortly after the invasion that Romania should remain neutral so that the Poles could establish lines of communication south to the Black Sea. Additionally, both countries still relied on French and British guarantees of sovereignty. However, with little sign of their intervention and the rapid collapse of Poland, Romania was now in a perilous position that would compel it further in the process of choosing an alliance with either Germany or the Soviet Union. Despite threats from Germany and the Soviet Union, King Carol II sought to strike an agreement with Germany, but none was forthcoming until Romania faced a greater threat from the Soviet Union.¹⁸

The German invasion of Poland was a catastrophe that caused Romanian military planners to assess the strategic environment, and the military problem. Romanian military planners were for a short time at a decision point as to whether and how to commit military forces for Poland's defense in accordance with their mutual defense treaty. However, the Romanian and Polish political decision not to enforce the alliance prevented the necessity for a military commitment. Nonetheless, the circumstances presented a situation where military planners of a small nation could leverage their knowledge of a strategic environment to anticipate change and plan accordingly.

A series of territorial losses in early 1940 prompted Romanian internal dissent and political change and forced an alliance with Germany in an effort to counter the considerable Soviet and Hungarian threat. Germany and the Soviet Union agreed in the Molotov-Ribbentrop

¹⁷ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, 485.

¹⁸ Ronald D. Bachman and Eugene K. Keefe, *Romania: A Country Study*, 2nd ed., Area Handbook Series (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1991), 40.

Pact of 1939 to mutual non-belligerence and agreed in a secret protocol to divide certain countries into spheres of influence. While Romania was unaware of the secret protocol, the Soviets in June 1940 demanded that Romania cede control of Bessarabia, in the east, and Bukovina, in the north, within 24 hours of notification. The German ambassador to Romania signaled that Romania should accede to the demand. King Carol relented, losing much domestic credibility in the process and illustrating the tension between his own preferences and the demands of structure. Two months later, in August 1940, Bulgaria reasserted control of the southern Romanian province of Dobruja, an area to which it maintained a strong historical claim. In this, Germany and the Soviet Union backed the Bulgarian claim. Finally, in August 1940, Romania lost a significant swath of Transylvania to Hungary when Germany and Italy arbitrated the Second Vienna Award to settle Hungarian territorial claims (and ensure Hungarian support for Germany). In the short course of a few months, these territorial losses dismantled *România Mare* and Romania lost significant territory, population, and resources. Internal dissent in the form of the fascist Iron Guard movement, coupled with the sudden grief and popular outrage at the loss of the territories, forced King Carol's abdication. After the king fled into exile, Marshal Ion Antonescu, a fascist sympathizer, assumed power and soon set the conditions for a formal alliance with Germany.¹⁹

The territorial losses had significant implications for Romanian military planners. They had to reframe the environment and their understanding of the problem and change their defensive operational concept. After Romania had satisfied its territorial ambitions after World War I, its operating concept shifted from offense to defense. To support the defense of its newly gained territories, Romania began a rearmament program in 1935 designed to counter Hungarian military growth. Marshal Antonescu, serving as the Chief of the General Staff, ordered the program, focusing on upgrades and standardization by Romanian arms producers, as well as the

¹⁹ Bachman and Keefe, 40-41.

licensing, local production, and import of important weapon systems.²⁰ The Romanian military also focused on a mechanization effort to overcome limited motorized resources and address a shortfall in armored forces. While the army could field a limited number of obsolete French tanks remaining from World War I, they were difficult to maintain and of limited capability. A small domestic production capability compelled the Romanians to look to allies for solutions. From 1936 to 1939, the Romanians licensed and produced or purchased armaments from Czechoslovakia, Poland, and France, including troop carriers, tanks, and artillery pieces.²¹

The Romanian military intended this rearmament program to support a defensive operating concept. The Romanian military in the interwar period established border defenses with extensive fortifications in the territories it had gained after World War I. However, as Romania lost these lands in 1940, it also lost the fortifications, along with significant stores of munitions it did not have time to move. Along with the defenses, Romania also lost the manpower associated with those lands. Manpower reserves fell by a third and hundreds of thousands of soldiers from those territories left the service and returned home. The Romanian military went from over a million men in mid-1940 to less than 650,000 by the end of the year. The loss of territories and associated manpower resulted in a loss of depth in the Romanian military, and forced a change in its defensive mindset to one of offense. Antonescu then requested Germany military assistance in retraining Romanian forces.²²

Romanian military planners might or might not have been able to anticipate the loss of significant territory together with defensive fortifications and manpower reserves. However, military planners of a small nation could benefit by having a deep understanding of the

²⁰ Axworthy et al., 28.

²¹ Ibid., 33-38.

²² Ibid., 28, 40-41.

environment and questioning assumptions. In this case, the territorial losses resulted in a change in the Romanian calculation of the balance of power.

After Germany's military successes in Europe and Romania's territorial losses of the Second Vienna Award in August 1940, the European balance of power and threat shifted again, requiring a Romanian reassessment of its position of neutrality. In the short months after the divestment of Greater Romania, Germany sought to ensure greater access to Romanian oil and petroleum, a critical requirement for a long-term war effort. The majority of capital investment in Romanian oil production belonged to Britain, France, the United States, and other European nations unfriendly to the Germans, a German vulnerability. For its part, Romania sought to acquire modern equipment and training for its army that Germany could provide. As early as 1940, the two nations struck terms for oil-for-arms agreements.²³ These oil links provided for a German effort to provide a military mission to Romania, ostensibly for assistance in rebuilding the Romanian military, but also to assist in defending the strategic oil fields from British sabotage.²⁴ With German troops on Romanian soil, the loss of territories to various other countries, and the apparent ineffectiveness of guarantees from distant friends, Romania was finally at a critical point for choosing an alliance.

This time it was Marshal Ion Antonescu, known as the *Conducător* or Leader, who was in a position to calculate the threat, power, and opportunities for alliance. Antonescu, an agent of great capability due to his position as a dictator and a fascist sympathizer, dominated a domestic environment with a weak monarchy and disorganized opposition until his eventual ouster by coup in 1944. A discussion between the Marshal and Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Reich Foreign Minister, on November 22, 1940 illustrates Romania's assessment of the threat to its existence. Antonescu, on a visit to Berlin, received a German interpretation of the meaning of the Second

²³ Dietrich Eichholtz and John Broadwin, *War for Oil: The Nazi Quest for an Oil Empire*, 1st ed. (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012), 22-23.

²⁴ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, ed. Paul R. Sweet, vol. XI (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1960), 279.

Vienna Award. Essentially, but for Germany's arbitration of the award, Romania would have come to a certain end. The Reich Minister explained that with Hungary already announcing its intentions to seize territory by force and with Romania vulnerable to Soviet maneuvering, the award was in fact a generous act that guaranteed the survival of the Romanian state. In fact, Hungary had gained less than what it desired and Romania kept at least some of the territories in Transylvania. Ribbentrop noted Germany's current military inertia against the British and stated it was in the Soviet Union's interest to continue to develop practical relations with the Axis. Further, the Minister expressed America's obstacles in joining the war. America's deficiencies in its capability to build military forces and its unwillingness to declare war on such a mighty coalition would prevail in deterring US involvement in the war. Finally, Ribbentrop detailed expansive German military capability that Antonescu, as a soldier, could fully appreciate.²⁵

This sober discussion illuminated Romania's strategic position, in that it and Germany faced a considerable Soviet threat and should balance together with the Germans. This, despite Germany's apparent shortcomings in assisting Romania in any substantive manner, seemed a logical choice and one that could avoid possibly ruinous consequences. The remainder of the conversation between Antonescu and Ribbentrop articulated the Romanian calculation of the threat it faced, primarily from further Soviet encroachment, particularly in areas of the Danube Delta that afforded Romanian access to the Black Sea. This development would open Romania's door to a potentially injurious Bolshevism. It was in Romania and Germany's interests to prohibit this advance.²⁶

Hitler's arrival cut short the discussion between the Marshal and the Reich Minister. Hitler, for his part, expressed understanding of the Romanian position and a regret of sorts that Germany was currently unable to intervene with military force on Romania's behalf. Echoing

²⁵ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, 657-659.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 661-662.

Ribbentrop, Hitler stated that Romania's very existence was precariously close to an end and only Germany's political efforts had been able to preserve the state. In fact, Hitler conveyed his discussion with Soviet Minister Molotov that Germany guaranteed Romania's current integrity. Antonescu in turn made his case for German political and economic assistance in rebuilding his nation internally and protecting Romanian minorities in the ceded territories. Additionally, Antonescu stated by what at this time was a *fait accompli*: Romania would sign the Tripartite Agreement, balancing against the greater threat posed by Russia.²⁷

From November 1940 until August 23, 1944, Romania was officially an ally of the Axis powers. The German ambassador to Romania, weeks prior to the offensive, informed Antonescu of Germany's plans to attack the Soviet Union in June 1941. Antonescu agreed to support the offensive by retaking Romania's lost territories of Bessarabia and Bucovina, but the Germans insisted Romanian mobilization not take place prior to commencement of its offensive to the north. In this, the alliance with Germany constrained Romania in using surprise to seize the initiative. However, it is unlikely Romania alone could have seized the initiative against Russia without German assistance and coordination as the Soviet forces in the area had significant offensive capability. Antonescu assumed field command of an army group consisting of the Romanian Third and Fourth Armies, as well as the German Eleventh Army that had been training Romanian forces, for a total of more than 325,000 personnel. However, the Soviet forces in the area not only outnumbered the Antonescu Army Group, but were also better armed.²⁸

As the Germans commenced their offensive to the north, the Soviets responded with some incursions into Romanian territory opposite Bessarabia. In this case, the Romanian forces were not able to set or dictate the terms of the action, but were able to defend for some weeks until Antonescu was able to mobilize and organize forces. After reorganization, the army group

²⁷ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, 664-666.

²⁸ Axworthy et al., 43-45.

commenced an offensive on July 2, 1941, eventually seizing the lost territory of Bessarabia on July 26. The German 1st Armored Division, together with its artillery, provided the maneuver and firepower capability to turn the Soviet defenses and force a Soviet withdrawal, regaining for Romania possession of its lost territories in the Soviet Union.²⁹

Over the next two years, Romanian military reversals, particularly at the Battle of Stalingrad, triggered yet another adjustment in the alliance arithmetic. The Germans sought to take the Soviet city of Stalingrad, using the German Sixth Army and Fourth Panzer Army to assault the city. Romanian and Hungarian formations defended the northern and southern flanks of the Sixth Army. In November 1942, the Soviets began an offensive to retake Stalingrad, attacking first on the northern flank and overrunning the Romanian Third Army in a matter of weeks. Almost simultaneously, the Soviets attacked the southern flank, overrunning the Romanian Fourth Army, enabling the encirclement and eventual defeat of the Germany Sixth Army.³⁰ For the German military planner, the lesson of placing weaker, allied formations on the flanks was significant due to the catastrophic nature of the loss of an entire field army. Henceforth, the Germans intermingled allied forces with their own rather than placing them in critical sectors alone. As the situation on the Eastern Front worsened, the reliability of Germany's allies became an issue.

Due to these military reversals as early as mid-1943, elements of the Romanian political establishment sought dialog with French and British contacts to negotiate a peace without Soviet involvement.³¹ However, a fractious opposition and other elements, including communists, sought not only the overthrow of the Antonescu regime and armistice with the Allies, but also

²⁹ Axworthy et al., 47.

³⁰ Ibid., 89-112.

³¹ Bachman and Keefe, 42.

cooperation with the Soviet Red Army.³² Looming in the background of these calculations was the developing military situation, particularly as the Red Army reached the Romanian frontier in Moldova in winter 1944. Also factoring into Romanian calculations was the apparent Western reluctance to make any guarantees on assisting Romania in a contest with the Communists. Romania also sought to secure as much of the lost Transylvania territory as possible.³³ Here, the structure of the Romanian political establishment influenced the situation, despite Antonescu's personal preferences of remaining allied with the Germans against the greater Soviet threat.

While the political situation at this time suggested a potential Romanian withdrawal from the alliance, German and Romanian military planners reformed their force structure after the defeat at Stalingrad. Marshal Antonescu wanted to place the remainder of the Romanian Third and Fourth Armies under Romanian command and defend the country from Soviet attack. German military planners opposed this reorganization, perhaps remembering the lesson from Stalingrad of placing Romanian-commanded forces on its flanks. The Germans agreed to a reorganization with two mixed army groups, each with Romanian and German forces and an integrated command structure, though a German would command one group and a Romanian the other. Group Wohler consisted of the Romanian Fourth Army and German Eighth Army, while Group Dumitrescu consisted of the Romanian Third Army and German Sixth Army. The intermingling of the forces could perhaps prevent tactical vulnerability on the flanks, but a shifting alliance presented a strategic vulnerability. With both army groups intermingled in Romania's east on the Ukrainian front by the end of March 1944, a change in alliances exposed the German military to gaps not only on their flanks, but also in their lines. With divisions from

³² Ceaușescu et al., 32.

³³ Bachman and Keefe, 43; Ceaușescu et al, 32; Axworthy et al, 199-200.

each nation under each army group, the integrated command structure also created the risk of confusion given a Romanian withdrawal from the alliance.³⁴

The political maneuvering within Romania climaxed on August 23, 1944 when King Mihai, the son of the deposed King Carol II, together with a small contingent of army officers and political actors, locked Marshall Antonescu in a safe and assumed power of the country.³⁵ Within hours, the king and his supporters arrested numerous opponents, gained support of key individuals in the military and political establishment, and isolated the German military headquarters in Bucharest.³⁶ After a period of imprisonment in Moscow, Antonescu returned to Romania in 1946 where the new communist government tried and executed him.³⁷ King Mihai signed an armistice on Soviet terms that put Romania in a disadvantaged position and subjugated the country to Soviet occupation.

The agent-structure dynamic helps in explaining these events. Until this time, the king had been mostly a figurehead with little political power. However, as the structure of the domestic Romanian political establishment mobilized support, the king again increased in importance and initiated the coup. The king became, like Antonescu had been, the central authority in Romania and the source of national policy change.

Though some Romanian officers on the front lines were likely privy to the possibility of a coup, they were unlikely to be aware of the timing of the action. However, the foreknowledge of the possibility of a coup, together with the unfavorable progress of the war, had already chilled Romanian military cooperation with the Germans. Despite this altered relationship, the Romanian military was not yet cooperating with the Soviet military and still actively opposed Soviet

³⁴ Axworthy et al., 157-158.

³⁵ Bachman and Keefe, 42.

³⁶ Axworthy et al., 178-179.

³⁷ Ibid., 216-219.

advances, suffering casualties in fighting up to August 23. A lack of coordination between military conspirators of the coup and officers in the field, likely an attempt to retain secrecy of the plot, also hindered Romanian detailed planning for actions in the event of a coup. However, with an effective Soviet exploitation in the face of crumbling German military resistance and Romanian political capitulation, Romanian military forces withdrew west towards Bucharest with the mission to secure the capital. Romanian military planners in this period affected a change in their actions based on the significant change in the environment. The Romanian military shifted from a combined offensive against the Soviets to secure territory in the east to withdrawing and, in cooperation with the Soviets, expelling the Germans from Romania.

Due to the German belief that Antonescu was firm in the alliance, the German military did not make extensive plans for a change, even reversing in mid-August earlier plans to send troops to Bucharest as a contingency. However, as Romanian resolve to the alliance faltered under Soviet advances on August 21, the German command began to issue orders directly its units under nominal Romanian command. What was left of the German field armies after battles with the Soviets withdrew to the west of Bucharest. Romanian and German forces at this time did not engage each other in combat, and the issue of the previously mixed army groups was mostly moot in the face of a Soviet offensive that pushed back the forces of both nations. German forces lost up to 150,000 dead and 106,000 wounded, leaving forces in the west of Romania as the bulk of the German effort. Subsequent efforts to take Bucharest and reverse the coup were unsuccessful due to Romanian resistance and the Soviets eventually reaching Bucharest.³⁸

Despite Romanian hopes that allying with the Soviets and the Western nations would mean a more beneficial position at the conclusion of the war, the nature of the armistice treated Romania more as a defeated foe than a co-equal.³⁹ Britain and the United States initially signaled

³⁸ Axworthy et al., 170, 175, 182-195.

³⁹ Sergiu Verona, *Military Occupation and Diplomacy: Soviet Troops in Romania, 1944-1958* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 27.

they would grant Romania co-belligerent status, which would have been a sanguine development indeed for a nation caught between the east and west. The United States even appointed an American Military Mission, headed by General Cortland V.R. Schuyler, in November 1944.⁴⁰ However, the Romanians did not know that Winston Churchill, at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, would cede virtually all influence in Romania to the Soviets.⁴¹ Just a month after the signing of the armistice, Churchill agreed to divide the occupation of Romania into 90% Soviet troops and 10% other.⁴² Despite Romanian efforts to shape their status after the war, the Allies decided the situation with little Romanian input.

The facts on Romania's actions in choosing alliances in World War II support the assertion that each decision resulted from calculations of threats to various parties. In addition, strong leaders were able to make these decisions despite the domestic political structure, until they became susceptible to coups. In his early desires to remain neutral in the conflict, Romania's king miscalculated the nature of the threat from the secret political agreements of great powers and fell victim to a coup. As Antonescu saw the categorical losses of vast territories, the injurious treatment of Romania's former citizens, and subtle threats of extermination, he decided it was better to ally with the Germans. Later, the king's son and successor, under pressure from foreign invasion, chose to ally with the Russians. In each scene, the implications of the balance and threat and power as theorized by Stephen Walt determined the choice.⁴³ For the operational artist, these circumstances provide the opportunity to consider actions that anticipate or mitigate strategic and political events.

⁴⁰ Grant Harris, *The Open House Collection: Documents from the Military Archives of Former Warsaw Pact Countries in the Library of Congress* (Washington, DC: Historical Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint History Office, 2000), 99.

⁴¹ Axworthy et al., 207.

⁴² Verona, 32.

⁴³ Walt, 4-8.

Finland

Finland enjoyed no formal alliances in World War II. The country steadily considered its position, calculating threats and power in all directions, but sought to maintain its sovereignty without entering alliances. In this, Finland maintained its neutrality as far as practicable and did not fully cooperate even when aligned with other nations. Finland's environment is an example of complexity, with both domestic political structures and external relationships. Walt's theories on balancing and bandwagoning add depth to Finland's motivations for choosing alliances or partnerships and the agent-structure dynamic provides an appreciation for the many interrelated variables in the environment.

A series of presidents and ministers all influenced and made decisions on Finland's actions and agreements. They all recognized the powerful hand of the Field Marshal of Finland Carl Mannerheim, still regarded as the greatest Finn of all time.⁴⁴ Decision makers also considered the Finnish citizenry, powerful in their own right as members of a state with a democratic tradition. The political decision making process in Finland illuminates how the country did or did not choose partners. The political structures and personalities surely drove the nation's choices, but the influences of interested parties, to include the citizenry, of a new but considerable democracy, wielded considerable pressure. This examination of the Finnish decision making progress will illuminate discussion of the country's involvement in World War II. The overarching theme of Finnish actions in World War II, while it did consider and calculate threat, is that it did very little in the way of making alliance choices, but avoided them and thereby had war thrust upon them.

While under nominal Russian rule for over a century before World War I, Finland developed its own considerable identity, nationhood, and autonomy with democratic structures,

⁴⁴ "Suuret Suomalaiset (Large Finnish)," YLE.fi, last modified 2004, accessed October 19, 2014, http://yle.fi/vintti/yle.fi/suuretsuomalaiset/in_english/index.html.

including popular vote for government office. Upon its declaration of independence in 1918, Finland retained its democratic identity with multiple parties. The division of power was such that no single party formed a majority. While an electoral college, determined by universal vote, elected the president, the Finnish constitution invested true power in the people in the form of a directly elected parliament. Elected members of parliament, from a diverse group of parties based alternatively on ethnic, economic, or ideological platforms, then formed cabinets. These cabinets represented the true power structure in the Finnish government.⁴⁵ Of particular note, in terms of alliances, are the Foreign Relations Committee and the Foreign Minister. Though the president directed Finnish foreign policy, the Foreign Minister and the committee held a great deal of power by virtue of their direct dealings with foreign diplomats. The minister, in accordance with the prevailing Finnish interest of maintaining sovereignty, could make an outright refusal to the Soviets if their demand violated that sovereignty. However, the minister often solicited the committee's views on certain issues, especially those concerned with the loss of sovereignty or sovereign lands.⁴⁶ This Finnish form of democratic, multi-party government resulted in a diffusion of power amongst elected officials and cabinet members, all beholden to an active Finnish populace aligned with different parties. It is possible to understand better the events of World War II against this background of a well-developed democracy and an empowered populace. It also provides an appreciation for the complexity of the domestic decision making process, with many interrelated agents, each with their own preferences. It demonstrates how Finnish military planners may evaluate the domestic political situation to augment strategic guidance in formulating an operational approach.

In broad terms, the Finns fought three separate wars during World War II. The interbellum period ended for the Finns in 1939 with the Winter War, when the Soviet Union,

⁴⁵ John H. Wuorinen, *A History of Finland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 234-242.

⁴⁶ Väinö Tanner, *The Winter War: Finland against Russia, 1939-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 168.

fresh from a rapid victory in Poland, invaded in order to exact territorial gains for security purposes. Following a peace where Finland lost some territory, but gained much prestige for its hard fought war, the Finns nominally partnered (but did not formally ally) with Nazi Germany for its campaigns on the Eastern Front. The Finns dubbed this the Continuation War. When Finland judged Germany to be close to defeat, it struck a separate peace with Moscow and expelled German troops by force from Finland in the Lapland War. At each point, the Soviet Union and Germany dominated the power and threat environment and the Finns calculated their actions in this dynamic and perilous context. From this broad narrative follows a more detailed understanding of how Finland guided its actions during this period and the implication of these actions for German and Finn operational level planners.

The Finns enjoyed considerable autonomy as a duchy under the Russian Empire and generally good relations with its neighbor to the east, though that ended with a Russian policy change centered in the Russification of Finland in the late 1800s. Overcoming a measure of domestic sympathy for Russia and Russian political and military efforts, Finland declared its independence and settled a civil war in favor of independence in 1918.⁴⁷ This conflict with Russia, ethnic-based issues with populations in Finland and Russia (later the Soviet Union) the proximity of Finnish territories to Leningrad, German assistance in the Finnish quest for independence, and the aftermath of World War I all provide context to Finland's political deportment in the interwar period and later military cooperation.

The Finns in the interwar period sustained an official policy of neutrality, despite territorial and ethnic disputes with the Soviet Union and previous German assistance in their quest for independence. While they were indebted to Germany for military aid during the Finnish struggle for independence, the Finns, under a new government in 1918, sought to minimize their German alignment. The new political establishment in Finland rejected Imperial German actions

⁴⁷ John H. Wuorinen, *Finland and World War II* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1948), 33-34.

in World War I and attempted to keep cordial, but distant, relations with Germany, as it turned to France and England for political models to follow.⁴⁸ The wish to remain neutral compelled Finland to pursue participation in the League of Nations and participate in protocols and pacts that sought to establish permanent neutrality. However, despite its wish to remain neutral, German and Soviet interests and actions in the 1930's indicated the possibility of war with Finland in a strategically hazardous location. Here, Finnish military planners had an opportunity to understand the operational environment and, despite wishes for neutrality, develop operating approaches to contend with the possibility of war, with or without allies.

The Finns sought to guarantee their position by formalizing a non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union in 1932.⁴⁹ In 1938, when suspicions of a German offensive against the Soviet Union sharpened, Soviet diplomats initiated a series of secret discussions with the Finns. In April 1938, the Soviets expressed concerns that Germany's attack would involve a northern front in Finland. The Soviets felt, perhaps not realistically, that the Germans would either gain political agreement for German bases or foment a fascist coup in Finland. For its part, the Soviet Union would counter the offensive by attacking into Finland, which the Finns may have interpreted as a veiled threat that the country would suffer if it failed to make cooperation agreements with the Soviet Union. In exchange for guarantees of opposing German efforts in Finland, the Soviets would commit to aiding Finland with economic and military cooperation. The Finnish Foreign Minister's immediate response to the Soviets was that the Finnish president determined foreign policy, but he, as foreign minister, would hear Soviet concerns.⁵⁰ The minister was noncommittal in his response, but the discussion did not end.

⁴⁸ Wuorinen, *Finland and World War II*, 34-35.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁰ Tanner, 4-6.

The talks continued into the summer of 1938, but they failed to lead to any definitive action.⁵¹ An initial meeting between Finnish and Soviet diplomats yielded fewer military decisions than discussion on commercial and trade issues, with the Soviets holding out economic incentives for undefined military cooperation. However, the Finnish delegation received the clear message that the Soviets sought a defensive outpost manned with Soviet troops in Finnish territory to counter German intentions to attack the Soviet Union.⁵²

Informal and formal discussions with the Soviets over the next year gained momentum, and in each case, the Finnish ambassador and foreign minister, in secrecy and without consulting the parliament or the people, disagreed with Soviet proposals. The Finns felt that further treaties or allowing Soviet movements in Finnish territory would represent a breach of neutrality.⁵³ However, against the backdrop of the German and Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939, discussions with the Soviet Union took a new turn.

Official Finnish delegations journeyed to Moscow for lengthy discussions and a dramatic personal meeting with the leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin, on October 14, 1939. In it, Stalin clearly articulated his nation's calculation of threat. Long-range artillery fire from Finland could threaten Leningrad, very near Finnish territory on the Karelian peninsula. As well, Finnish islands and territories offered strategic positions for Soviet forces to prevent an incursion into and loss of control of the Gulf of Finland. Stalin offered a land swap, with the Soviets receiving a strategically significant portion of Finnish territory in exchange for a sizable, but insignificant, portion of land to the north. When the lead Finnish diplomat said that Finland wished to remain neutral in any potential conflict, Stalin stated bluntly, "That's impossible."⁵⁴

⁵¹ Max Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War: An Account of the Russo-Finnish War, 1939-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 9.

⁵² Tanner, 13.

⁵³ Ibid., 15-16.

⁵⁴ Tanner, 30.

Finland also sought neutral relations with Nazi Germany, despite Imperial Germany's earlier, significant support for Finnish independence. As Germany continued a military buildup and aggressive diplomatic maneuvers in the mid-to late 1930s, Finnish cabinet members realized that the country must distance itself from their former friend or risk becoming entangled in a war between great powers. This policy, while pushing Finland towards a reconciliation and willingness for discussion with the Soviet Union, did not preclude contacts with Nazi Germany.

German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop on April 28, 1939, in a meeting with the Foreign Ministers of a number of countries, offered the prospect of a formal non-aggression treaty not only with Finland, but also with other Scandinavian and Baltic nations.⁵⁵ A week later, Finnish Foreign Minister Elias Erkko signaled to the German Ambassador, Wipert von Blücher, the Finnish government's agreement in principle to the overture. While German foreign policy documents record Blücher's pleasure at receiving an agreement of sorts, the Finns meant it as a rebuff.⁵⁶ The Finnish position was that it accepted German wishes of stability and non-aggression, but found a treaty to that fact unnecessary, likely only to snare Finland in a war between the great powers.⁵⁷ Later diplomatic exchanges with Germany were of a cool nature, much to the dissatisfaction of the German side.⁵⁸ The German interpretation was that dissent within the Finnish government precluded a formal agreement. Whatever the case, Finland opted not to enter a formal non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany.

The Finnish authorities, apart from purely diplomatic considerations, assessed the country's military operational position as sensitive to Soviet strategic preferences. Soviet desires to further buffer Leningrad from the Finnish border contradicted Finland's security interest in

⁵⁵ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, 359.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 408.

⁵⁷ Tanner, 17.

⁵⁸ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, 513-514.

terms of an effective defense. Finnish military operational concerns were evident and strongly influenced the calculation. The existing border with the Soviet Union was at its narrowest extent on the Karelian peninsula, allowing for a concentration of forces on a relatively short defensive line. Moving the border to such a position as to reassure the Soviets would involve lengthening the lines, requiring a larger force for its defense, a poor economy of force measure. Moving the border as the Soviets wished would, in the event of a Soviet attack on Finland, provide an advantage to the Soviets by extending their operational reach and preventing early culmination.⁵⁹

Another considerable military implication of moving the border would be the loss of the Mannerheim Line, a series of fortifications twenty years in the building that stretched across the frontier. The Finns positioned the line up to sixty-five kilometers from the border, providing depth to prevent tactical surprise. In addition to terrain unsuited for maneuver, the Finns constructed bridges with explosives integral to the structure, making the explosives undetectable. The Finnish military calculated that the terrain, distance, and obstacles, combined with delaying and harassing tactics, would deprive a Soviet invading force of mobility and the ability to mass forces. Therefore, losing the Mannerheim Line through a border change represented a serious disadvantage to the Finns if the Soviets later chose to attack.⁶⁰ Aside from the political implications of ceding territory to the Soviets, these key operational characteristics of the Karelian Peninsula significantly influenced the political discussion. These military preparations also demonstrate that Finnish planners understood the operational environment and problem: Soviet proximity and mass required a defense in depth. The operational approach of a defense in depth at the narrowest point possible shows how an understanding of the problem results in an operational approach, with tactical actions arranged accordingly.

⁵⁹ Tanner, 32.

⁶⁰ Viktor Suvorov, *The Chief Culprit: Stalin's Grand Design to Start World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 136-138.

The Soviet and Finnish positions on the border situation were irreconcilable. Diplomatic dialog over the preceding year ultimately proved unfruitful on bringing the two sides to an agreement. Unable to fulfill their security aims of moving the Finnish border farther from Leningrad through diplomatic means, the Soviets initiated the Winter War on November 30, 1939.

The Finnish armed forces consisted of up to eight divisions of regular forces and up to six additional divisions of civic and frontier guards for a total force of around 400,000.⁶¹ Finland supplied itself well with materiel, partially through Swedish factories (including one located in Finland) and domestic production from a number of armament and munitions factories. Finland also received assistance in the form of airplanes, munitions, and armaments, from England, France, and Sweden. Italy and Spain also contributed materiel.⁶² France claimed to be of the greatest international assistance to the Finns, providing airplanes, artillery pieces, machine guns, rifles, and small arms munitions, but England also provided sizable shipments. Sweden was of particular assistance due to the volume of the material provided, but also because of proximity and the ability to quickly ship arms.⁶³

The Soviets initially committed up to fourteen divisions, outnumbering the Finns, but facing disadvantageous terrain and a well-prepared defense. Additionally, purges in the Soviet army in the previous two years resulted in younger, inexperienced officers replacing seasoned commanders, detracting from their advantage of superior numbers. Conducted on multiple fronts, the most important being on the Karelian peninsula in the face of the Mannerheim Line, the offensive quickly lost momentum and the Finnish preparations proved effective. Aided chiefly by

⁶¹ Military Intelligence Division, *Special Bulletin No. 2, Soviet-Finnish War* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1940), 1-11.

⁶² W. P. Coates and Zelda K. Coates, *The Soviet-Finnish Campaign, Military & Political, 1939-1940* (London: Eldon Press Ltd., 1942), 19-21.

⁶³ Tanner, 132-133.

a small contingent of Swedish skiers and around 500 Norwegian volunteers, together with weather, terrain, and superior initiative at lower levels, the Finns were able to blunt the initial Soviet attack.⁶⁴ However, after Field Marshal Mannerheim's assessment that the Finnish military position on the Karelian peninsula was untenable due to Soviet gains, Finnish administration sought peace negotiations with the Soviet Union. Mannerheim's understanding of the environment provided him the understanding that a military approach would not be effective in the long term, triggering an effort for a diplomatic solution. Perhaps reluctant to keep their forces committed against Finland in the face of a possible German attack on the Soviet Union, the Soviets were amenable to a diplomatic end to the war. With its position strong enough to demand militarily significant territories on the Karelian peninsula and some lands in the north, the Soviets offered a peace that Finland accepted on March 12, 1940, having solved the chief problems Stalin identified.⁶⁵

It is unclear whether the Finnish rebuff of the German desires for a non-aggression pact would have made a difference in the Winter War. The pact did not suggest a mutual defense aspect and Finland would likely have stood alone even with a non-aggression treaty with Germany. In the case of the Winter War, Finland did not make a choice to ally or partner, but only to remain neutral as the Soviets forced war upon them.

⁶⁴ Military Intelligence Division, 1-11.

⁶⁵ Wuorinen, *Finland and World War II*, 78-79.



Figure 2. Finnish Territory (shaded) Lost to Soviet Union After the Winter War.

Source: "Background-Events Prior to the Continuation War," accessed November 11, 2014, <http://rajajoki.com/background.htm>.

In the aftermath of the Winter War, the Finnish government enjoyed a peace still threatened by the struggle of great powers and not free from further negotiations with the Germans, who sought to exploit the Finnish proximity to the Soviet Union for an eventual attack. Finland still held great enmity towards the Soviets, but some conditions had changed. Despite its

previous policy of distancing itself from Germany, Finland realized its vulnerable political position between German and the Soviet interests and the remoteness of the possibility of assistance from other countries. Ultimately, the Soviets would again force war upon the Finns, who still did not ally with Germany but might maintain an arms-length partnership with the Germans due to common interests.

The Germans understood Finland's precarious strategic position in regards to its proximity to Soviet territory. The Winter War had shown that Finland could not stand alone for long, for though Finland survived the war, it lost important territory. The Soviets held a position of advantage and continued to seek more concessions, including access to a nickel mine coveted by both the Germans and the Soviets. Germany's occupation of Norway and Denmark in April 1940 altered the regional balance of power by diminishing Finland's hopes of support from those countries. Finland required external support and trade from Britain and other countries and could not afford to alienate them by allying with the Germans. However, the Germans calculated that Finland might enter the Tripartite Pact as a balance against the Soviet Union.⁶⁶ Here, an understanding of the complexity of the environment informs the military planner, providing a depth to the application of Walt's theory of balancing versus bandwagoning.

Germany, no doubt preparing for an offensive against the Soviet Union, began thawing relations with Finland in August 1940. The German government first freed some Finnish arms shipments it had confiscated and then, in unofficial and rather secret discussions, approved an arms deal in exchange for the transport of German military forces across Finnish territory. The German troops were to arrive in Finnish ports in the north and transit west to Norway. Finland agreed to the deal in order to receive the arms shipment, but more importantly, because of the impression that German troops on Finnish soil could deter against Soviet aggression. The logic behind the decision was that with Finland between the two great powers of Germany and the

⁶⁶ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, ed. Raymond James Sontag, vol. XII (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1962), 433-435.

Soviet Union, unnecessarily provoking both could result in a partition of Finland, either by agreement or happenstance. By making an agreement with Germany, it could provide a counter to Soviet influence. Germany wished to officially keep secret the agreements in order to avoid the risk of impacting German-Soviet relations, but at Finnish insistence, the two countries struck an agreement. However, even though a small step, representatives of the Finnish government interpreted the agreement as a significant step in reducing Soviet pressure. The Finnish parliament accepted the agreement, and when made public, the Finnish public supported the even temporary presence of German troops. Even England and the United States, while troubled by German successes, understood that Finland had made the decision under German duress and accepted the agreement without undue rancor.⁶⁷

German troops began transportation across Finnish territory, bound for Norway, in September 1940. When Foreign Minister Witting informed the Soviet ambassador of the development, the Soviet reaction was to be immediately apprehensive of Germany having issued an ultimatum, potentially piquing suspicions of German ill intent towards the Soviet Union.⁶⁸ It also highlights how an operational matter of troop transportation became a strategic issue with meaning for Finnish-Soviet relations. Though an operational movement, the Finns hoped that the mere presence of German troops would serve as a strategic deterrent.

From September 1940 on, German and Finnish cooperation accelerated. The two governments appointed officers in May 1941 to meet and consider military cooperation, with a Finnish justification that it be only in the case of a Soviet attack rather than as a co-belligerent with Germany. The Finns saw serious signs of friction between Germany and the Soviet Union, primarily by assessing activities in Romania that pointed to signs of imminent war. The Finnish Minister in Romania provided a great deal of intelligence that indicated a coming conflict,

⁶⁷ Wuorinen, *Finland and World War II*, 91-95.

⁶⁸ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, 160.

including mobilization of Romanian troops, German troop reinforcement on the frontier, and concentration of Russian forces. Additionally, the Finnish minister in Germany reported movement of German armor eastward.⁶⁹

As military cooperation between Finland and Germany increased, and indications of war became more prominent, Minister Witting transmitted to Blücher the results of a meeting he had with his parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs. In it, the members learned that Finnish military forces began to mobilize on June 10, 1941, with the expectation of a Soviet attack. The Finnish General Staff, anticipating a conflict, issued the order for "a camouflaged mobilization." Even still, some members of the cabinet hesitated, believing the mobilization could be for offensive rather than defensive purposes. Additionally, the members were concerned that the military had not consulted the committee first. Nonetheless, Finland, in expecting a Soviet attack, fell back on its old philosophy that Russia's enemy is a friend and requested not an alliance with Germany, but "moral and material support."⁷⁰ In this case, an operational matter of mobilizing forces took on strategic implications in regards to Finland's relationship with the Soviets.

In fact, the Finns did not enter a formal agreement up to the start of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. Despite Adolf Hitler's public statement on that day that the Germans and Finns stood together, German diplomats unsuccessfully sought a formal agreement with Finland in the days leading to Barbarossa. Though none was forthcoming, the circumstances of a German attack on the Soviet Union, combined with the resulting Soviet attack on Finland, ensured Finland's participation in what it called the Continuation War from June 1941 to September 1944.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Wuorinen, *Finland and World War II*, 97-99.

⁷⁰ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, 1023, 1038-1039.

⁷¹ Wuorinen, *Finland and World War II*, 100-101.

Despite the appearance of Finnish-German partnership, the Finns believed they were fighting a war separate from the German-Soviet struggle. Finnish interests were primarily in winning back the Karelian lands lost to the Soviets and eliminating Soviet occupation, thereby maintaining Finnish sovereignty.⁷² These relatively limited goals conflicted with the German aim to invade and occupy the Soviet Union. For the Finns, the Continuation War was an extension of the Winter War, where Finland stood alone against the Soviet Union, and the conflict had no connection to Nazism. In fact, this situation where Finland was not allied with Germany but could cooperate at will for a common interest had operational effects. For example, the Finns, fighting the Soviets on their terms and for their own interests, refused German entreaties to attack Leningrad and the Murmansk Railway because these were German objectives that did not fulfill Finnish interests.⁷³ The implication for large nation operational planners is that they must be aware of small nation perceptions of the conflict, with the resulting limitations and caveats for employment.

To be sure, the German attack and the Soviet response forced Finland's actions. Finland's accuracy of the measure of the Soviet threat, absent a German attack, is unknown, but the Soviet Union's previous aggression and designs on Finnish resources informed their calculations. However, once the war commenced, the Finnish people did not object to the opportunity to regain lost lands. Despite the common interests and enemy, Finland still retained a great deal of autonomy in directing its forces towards the military objectives of recovering territories lost in the Winter War, primarily on the Karelian Isthmus. These objectives did not always align with German plans, as when the Finnish sought to make the Karelian Isthmus the focus of effort. The German High Command wanted Finnish forces to instead mass to the north of the Karelian

⁷² Waldemar Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War: Classified Studies in Twentieth-Century Diplomatic and Military History* (Washington, DC: University Publications of America, 1979), 20.

⁷³ Jakobson, 257.

Isthmus, on the opposite side of Lake Ladoga, in order link up with a Germany army group for a decisive battle with Soviet forces.⁷⁴ Again, the lesson for the operational artist of a major power is recognizing small nation interests and military objectives, discovering opportunity for common objectives.

Throughout the Continuation War, Finland sought its own interests against the Soviet Union and cooperated to some degree with German forces. The Germans sought to make headway towards the Soviet Murmansk Railway, while the Finns wanted to regain lands it had lost in the Winter War. However, in February 1943, as the German position of strength eventually deteriorated and American diplomats vigorously encouraged Finland to conclude a separate peace with the Soviet Union, Finnish public support for peace grew.⁷⁵ Finland, in its calculation to stay with Germany in the face of an eventual Soviet victory or make a potentially harsh peace with the Soviets, considered the military situation. The Finns also considered the sentiment of the people, who were not of a single mind, and the prospects of a lasting peace. These complex circumstances also affected the domestic political situation and President Ryti, though nominally the chief executive and the decision maker for foreign policy, had to seek approval from the Parliament and face public wrath for any possible decision.

Acting without parliamentary approval, Ryti accepted an offer of German military aid on June 26, 1944. The agreement prevented an outright surrender to the Soviet Union by providing time and space for diplomatic developments. Ryti, recognizing the unlikelihood of parliamentary approval but acknowledging the military necessity of the decision, signed the agreement. This ensured German material assistance to improve its position at the bargaining table, without forcing the parliament to abstain from seeking a separate peace from the Soviets. After Ryti's resignation on August 1, 1944, Field Marshal Mannerheim assumed the presidency with a

⁷⁴ Erfurth, 20-21, 24.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 160-161.

mandate to establish peace with the Soviet Union, ultimately signing a treaty with the Soviets on September 19, 1944.⁷⁶

Mannerheim, regarded as an anti-bolshevist and also greatly admired by Hitler, seemed an unlikely person to make peace with the Soviets. In a letter to Hitler that ended the military cooperation, Mannerheim was gracious despite the split.⁷⁷ Despite Mannerheim's personal preferences, the prevailing necessities of ending the war demanded he end cooperation with Germany. Upon the departure of Nazi elements from Helsinki, German forces in other parts of Finland suddenly faced their former partners having to enforce their retreat, resulting in conflict between the two. This series of clashes between the Germans and Finns was the Lapland War of September 1944-April 1945, characterized by a great deal of operational confusion resulting from former partners now in conflict.

The Germans, anticipating a probable separate peace between Finland and the Soviets, had made plans for an evacuation of Finland. Here, a clear German understanding of the operational environment informed their potential reframing of the situation, resulting in a change in military plans. Operational level planners, as early as September 1943, one year prior to execution, prepared contingency plans for two operations in the event that Finland withdrew from the partnership. The first was a withdrawal of German troops from the Eastern Front in Finland to the north of Norway. German troops were to withdraw from the front, but also reinforce positions to retain a nickel mine of strategic importance on the northern tip of Finland. The other operation was to seize two island chains in the Baltic Sea from which they could control sea traffic. Control of the first island chain, at the mouth of the Gulf of Bothnia, facilitated the withdrawal of naval and land forces from the north of Finland. Control of the second island, off the coast of Helsinki,

⁷⁶ Wuorinen, *Finland and World War II*, 174, 179.

⁷⁷ Erfurth, 209-210.

facilitated control of the Gulf of Finland and protection from Soviet naval assaults.⁷⁸ German operational level planners, considering the political environment and the acts of a small state partner, had prepared plans up to a year in advance.

Within days of the signing of the separate peace, the Germans executed the operation to seize the island off the coast of Helsinki in order to blockade the Gulf of Finland and protect against a Russian navy assault. The Germans attempted an amphibious landing on the islands defended by the Finns, in each case failing to make significant gains. The two former partners were now in pitched conflict. As Germans in the north of Finland attempted to evacuate under pressure from the Soviets in the east and the Finnish forces in the south, they destroyed some infrastructure, inflaming tensions with the Finns. In what could have been a response to the German destruction, a Finnish unit raided a German position, allegedly committing atrocities in a German field hospital. The official Finnish position was that these atrocities were committed under the initiative of lower level commanders. Nonetheless, German-Finnish tensions increased, resulting in several pitched battles between the former partners. The Germans also believed that the Soviets, wishing to enforce their peace terms with Finland, placed commissars with the Finnish forces to monitor their actions and communications. It is unclear if they actually did.⁷⁹

Soviet forces also engaged the Germans, though apparently with no evident cooperation between the Soviets and Finns. The Germans carried on with their evacuation in the face of Soviet and Finnish pressure and were complete by January 1945. The Finnish armed forces, while fighting slowed and the Germans completed their evacuation, partially demobilized in accordance with the Soviet peace treaty. By the end of 1944, even before the final withdrawal of the

⁷⁸ Erfurth, 219-222.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 229-237.

Germans, Finnish forces were demobilized but for a small force of 32,000, down from a high of around 400,000.⁸⁰

A calculation of the balance of threat and power, made by men of different offices and position, informed Finland's decisions to stand alone, partner (if not ally) with the Germans, and then strike a peace with the Soviet Union and expel the Nazis. Minister Holsti's response to the Soviet diplomat before the Winter War reveals not only his country's official position, but also some of the dynamics that drove Finnish national calculations of threat and the resulting decision-making. In explaining the limitations of his power, Holsti made clear he could participate in diplomatic dialogue, but relied on the president to make decisions.⁸¹ However, despite the minister's protestations that the president alone determined the nation's relations, each president's style and personal preferences affected how much interest and influence he wielded in the debate. Additionally, the actions of the prime ministers mattered varied based on who held the office at any particular time, and often times his activities were more in the economic realm than in foreign policy. The Foreign Minister too was more than a mere figurehead or channel for communications, and each of the men who held the office wielded not-insignificant power in calculating threats and opportunities.⁸² Finally, the Finnish defense establishment, embodied by Marshal of Finland (and later president) Mannerheim provided depth to the strategic issues and informed politicians on the operational aspects of their positions.

The people of Finland themselves were not to be discounted by the politicians and military. The citizens of the country felt that agreeing to Soviet territorial demands would be a humiliating loss of sovereignty.⁸³ Government agreement to such an arrangement would have caused a loss of legitimacy with the people and politicians acted accordingly. This bonded group

⁸⁰ Erfurth, 246.

⁸¹ Tanner, 6.

⁸² Jakobson, 20.

⁸³ Ibid., 10.

of politicians, diplomats, military, and citizenry, against the backdrop of a conflict between two grand powers, determined how Finland implemented its conduct in its three wars of the era.

Finland's political environment and its actions as a small state have implications for operational level planners, especially for those of major powers. Of particular note is the need to understand the interests and objectives of small states and the resulting limitations and caveats for integration of troops in overall plans. German planners had to compensate for Finland's reluctance to exceed its own objectives and its refusal to cooperate in an assault into Soviet territory. The opportunity for the planner in this situation is in being able to leverage partner support under circumstances that satisfy the objectives and interests of both countries. Also of importance to the operational level planner is anticipating a change in the political environment such as a small nation withdrawing from a partnership. German planners had anticipated such a change and developed contingency plans for the withdrawal of troops and the defense of key terrain. While the German execution of these plans was less successful than they had desired, operational level planners of a large nation can benefit from their example.

Conclusion

Romania and Finland, while not perishing like the Melians, suffered what the weak must. Thucydides described the dynamic of strong and weak states thousands of years ago and realists of the modern era seek to explain phenomena through this framework. Indeed, they do well in providing an overarching theme—small nations have little choice when caught between large powers. However, in considering the profundities of circumstance and avoiding a simplistic narrative, Walt offers a more detailed tool to analyze alliances—the balance of threat. In addition, the agent-structure debate provides a further basis for considering small nation alliances. Applying these theories to the examples of Romania and Finland in World War II provides information for the modern strategic practitioner to anticipate future events. However, it also provides a number of considerations for the operational artist in visualizing an operating environment and acting accordingly.

Romania's interest at its most basic was its survival. The issue of territory involved not only the resources associated with the land but also the people. A considerable number of ethnic Romanians, overnight, did not cross a border, but had a border cross them. This loss rapidly diminished the Romanian king's legitimacy. One could argue Marshal Antonescu's decision to join an alliance was an issue of honor and not simply survival, due to his statements on standing together against the Slavs. Without making light of the ethnic issue, the Romanian government certainly was still concerned with its very existence—the collapse of Poland and Czechoslovakia were recent examples of countries simply ceasing to exist. The material power, therefore, of both the Soviet Union and Germany, manifested its ease in either seizing territory or sanctioning it, was evident to the Romanians.

Finland also looked to the Soviet Union's material power with distrust, but not without a sense of hope it could avoid it without the entanglement of a formal alliance. Germany also wielded a considerable measure of power and Finland sought to harness some of it for its own

defense. However, Finland also amassed a great deal of material power that, together with a beneficial terrain advantage, held the hope of withstanding Soviet aggression.

For both Romania and Finland, the issue of proximity was more significant in their calculations in regards to the Soviet Union rather than Germany. Though Germany's conquest of Czechoslovakia and part of Poland brought Germany territory closer to Romania, the Soviet Union was clearly the nearer of the two. As it relates to the projection of power, though, Germany could project power into Romania. However, the Soviet Union possessed the ability to project power, and proximity alone would not determine Romania's alliance. For Finland, Soviet pressure in terms of proximity was much sharper than that for Romania due to its nearness to the key city of Leningrad. Again, Germany was not a great distance from Finland, but the Soviet Union's proximity was a prominent factor. From the Soviet perspective, the proximity of the Finnish border to Leningrad and the resulting vulnerability was an overriding concern. These issues of proximity illuminate a small power's calculations on the balance of threat.

Related to the issue of proximity and its implications for power projection is Walt's criteria of offensive power. Together with proximity and its facilitation of power projection, Romania and Finland considered the Soviet Union's offensive power—considerable, but not so considerable as to ensure certain and swift victory. Certainly, both Romania and Finland could calculate the Soviet Union's offensive power, especially in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Poland. Finland though, felt able to withstand Soviet offensive power even without a military alliance, as it did for some time during the Winter War. Finland again avoided making an alliance in the face of Soviet offensive power in the run up to the Continuation War, though it did seek to counter Soviet offensive power with its own materiel purchased from a number of nations. For Romania in 1944, the Soviets demonstrated overwhelming offensive power, contributing to a decision to switch sides and bandwagon, in a way, with its primary threat of Russia. Germany, too, possessed a great deal of offensive power, but for Walt's last criteria of offensive intention, it was not as significant an issue for Romania and Finland in comparison to Soviet intentions.

For both Romania and Finland, Russia signaled offensive intent. For Finland, Russia explicitly communicated its threat by articulating its position regarding the border on the Karelian Peninsula. Moreover, after the Winter War the Finns expected a Soviet attack, as evidenced by its conciliatory moves towards Germany, though still not joining the Tripartite Agreement. Romania lost territory to Russia. Though the Germans provided an approval of sorts for Hungary to seize a large portion of Romanian territory, the Romanians did not lose territory to Germany itself. These circumstances demonstrate that Russia, not Germany, posed the more explicit threat to both Romania and Finland.

These circumstances of proximity and offensive intent provide for placement of Romania and Finland into Walt's theory of balance of threat. Romania chose first to balance with Germany against the main threat of Russia in 1940. However, when faced with overwhelming Soviet offensive intent and capability as circumstances changed in 1944, Romanian chose to bandwagon with Russia, its main threat. Finland is harder to fit in the theoretical mold. Throughout the conflicts, Finland obstinately stood by its neutrality. However, even in the absence of formal alliances, Finland first balanced with Germany against Russia, then turned against the Germans out of treaty obligation. In both cases, the countries survived, though not with the most preferential outcome—for Finland, the loss of significant territory and Romania falling into the Soviet sphere of influence. However, the survival of each nation meant they did not perish like the Melians.⁸⁴

Walt's balance of threat framework, with the application of its criteria for calculations, does not alone explain Romanian and Finnish decisions to ally or not to ally. The structure-agent dynamic also adds definition to the issue. Romania had a number of agents with seemingly a great deal of capability and strong preferences. King Carol reigned over Greater Romania, the

⁸⁴ While some aspects of the alliance theory are applicable to all countries, such as existential threats and balancing, it appears that major powers are unlikely to bandwagon, suggesting a difference in how small and large powers act. Whether small nations choose alliances in a fundamentally different manner than major powers is an area of further study.

largest extent of its borders in its history. However, upon losing significant territories, the structures within the state such as political opposition and the sentiments of the people had enough power that the king lost legitimacy and removed him from the throne. Another agent, Marshal Antonescu, then had a clear mandate to ensure the survival of the state, compelling him to set aside a wish for neutrality and ally with the Germans. Antonescu, in turn, found himself in circumstances similar to King Carol in that a political opposition ousted him in a coup. For King Carol, Marshal Antonescu, and later King Mihai, it seems circumstance forced each of them to act and then they faced the consequences.

Finnish agents were even more constrained by structures than the Romanians. A historical tradition for democracy ensured strong political parties supported by the direct vote of the Finnish population. The Finnish political structure of the parliament as a whole, along with the Foreign Relations Committee, constrained the actions of any particular agent such as the prime minister or foreign minister. In one case, a president sidestepped the political process and signed an agreement of his own accord, but knew that act would require his resignation. His successor, President Mannerheim, had preferences more in line with his German compatriots. However, his military experience and the political structure around Mannerheim dictated a separate peace with the Soviets, mandating a turn against the Germans. For the Finns, it appears their choices in World War II were in fact a lack of choice. The constraints of its structure precluded joining an alliance or effectively maintaining neutrality. The Soviets eventually forced the Finns into action with an attack, limiting their choices in how to try to remain neutral.

The implications for the military planner are in understanding the strategic context of alliances in order to anticipate how political changes and differing national interests can affect the operational environment. These effects touch aspects of planning including the organization of control structures, selecting military objectives based on common national interests, and the placement of allied forces into integrated operations. Planners must also consider contingency planning in case an ally does not cooperate, withdraws from the alliance, or even changes

alliances and becomes a threat. Political decisions can turn partners into potential or actual adversaries and adversaries into partners. From perspectives of both large and small nations, issues of interoperability and how to cooperate often guide actions. However, at the moment of transition from one side to another, there is a fundamentally different issue—how to manage the potentially confusing and chaotic situation of a changed alliance. The strategic objectives remain the same, but gaining or losing a partner will likely require a different operational approach or at least a modification of it.

Walt and Waltz offer a framework to analyze small nation alliances. Romania and Finland fit well into the framework and assist in determining how small nations choose alliances, but do not alone answer the question. Viewing the circumstances through the agent-structure framework also assists in illuminating the decision making process at the state level, demonstrating that even agents of great capability are constrained by various structures. However, the overarching theme in how small nations choose alliances is that they often have little choice at all. Soviet attacks compelled Finnish action, against their wishes for neutrality. Romania, too, attempted to stay out of the struggle between great powers, but after a loss of territory and experiencing the turning tides of war joined an alliance. Both states survived and did not suffer the same fate as the Melians at the hands of Athens, but Thucydides' words on power, rightness, and suffering are as apt a framework as any.

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